

“The Night Light of The World”

December 24th, 2016
Christmas Eve Sunday

John 1:1-14, “O Little Town of Bethlehem”;
Luke 1:26-38, “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”;
Luke 1:39-45, “What Child Is This?”, Matthew 1:18-25, “The First Nowell”;
Luke 2:1-7, “Away in a Manger”; Matthew 2:1-9^a, “We Three Kings of Orient Are”;
Luke 2:8-20, “Angels We Have Heard on High”; Matthew 2:9^b-12, “Joy to the World”

*In [Christ the Word] was life, and the life was the light of [humanity].
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

John 1:4

Let us pray... O God,
Our prayers may not be fancy like a poem or a song, or clever or brilliant,
but let our prayers be a way to find you to light the way on our life journeys...

Amen

When I was very little, I *became* afraid of the dark.
I don't think I had always been afraid of the dark,
but *became* afraid of the dark,
It was sometime around when I was 4 or 5 years old –
not because of some traumatic event,
but probably just from seeing and learning more about the world,
that my imagination took off.
Imagination can be a blessing – and not so much of a blessing,
if we don't balance it with reality.
I said 'balance', because we should never suppress imagination
when it just needs a little discipline – or distraction.

I told my mother one night, that I was scared,
so she left the hall light on –as she closed my door.
I could then see the reflected light under the door – and it worked!
I was out... like a light!
Soon after, my folks got one of those little triangular, translucent plastic lights
that plugged into the wall as a “nightlight”.
That worked, too, for awhile – until I stopped noticing and
stopped needing the light, in my bedroom at night, at all...

When you think about it, the Moon has served as kind of a 'night light'
for the sake of human-kind over the millennia.
The amount of light is not the same each night
since the Moon changes appearance throughout the month,
but it must have been reassuring for primitive people,
reminding them that they were not alone in the dark...

Willard, p.2

We generally think of darkness in terms of how hard it is to *see in the dark* –
like getting up in the middle of the night for a drink of water
and maneuvering passed the unseen furniture and things in your way.
This is true – except when you are outside looking up at the night sky.
Then, darkness actually reveals much more of what's going on in the sky.
During the day, we are prevented from seeing very far,
because of the proximity of the Sun
and the effect of our atmosphere on its rays,
which cause the blueness of the sky
and the various colors of sunrise and sunset.

Yet with the darkness, we are able to see deep into the Universe –
to see the light of stars from long ago.

Together with the Moon,
stars and planets, comets and meteors have lit up the sky
keeping us company as they have done for millennia;
and their placement and movements still teach us about direction and time,
and for stargazing astrologers,
their patterns tell stories and hint at the future.

Such astrologers long ago observed a celestial event –
whether it was the alignment of several planets, the appearance of a supernova,
or some other unidentified... object, that served as a sign
of Divine providence, important enough for them to go see for themselves.

Scientists who are astronomers are still looking to the sky to see what it has to tell us.
Though science demands observable proofs, yet their discoveries sometimes
align with religious belief.

Take for example, evidence for the Big Bang theory which suggests that
'In the Beginning...' of both the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of John,
God really did speak and that the Word was 'Go!'

Thanks to radio-telescopes on Earth and on satellites, with help from computers,
we know the Universe is still expanding, pushing outward,
but there are also pathways of attraction, pulling galaxies together.

There are galaxies and superclusters of galaxies that form structures that are beyond
our capacity to imagine, especially when you consider
our galaxy – the Milky Way itself, only appears as a dot on the outer edge
of a supercluster called Laniakea, a word that means 'Immense Heaven'.

So, our Solar System – let alone Planet Earth, is hardly a dot on that dot!
When you think about it, our place in the Universe puts things in perspective,
such that our problems and our possibilities seem pretty small in comparison...

Willard, p.3

We might look at the immensity of that “outer” space and be overwhelmed by the utter loneliness of being in the dark, but think of this...

The complexity of Earth teeming with life seems beyond management – let alone observation from such a vantage point of the farthest flung star. Yet when you consider such complexity exists at all, here on the fringe of this vast, Universe still in motion – we can begin to imagine the immensity of a God who is capable of intimacy with this fragile world even to the level of our subatomic, microscopic building blocks...

In the words of the Apostle Paul,

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 9:38-39

As Christians, we believe God came to the Earth as one of us – not to micromanage things nor just to set an example, but to let us know that the God who created all there is, knows we are here and loves us, and wants us to know we are not alone – “God is with us”, “Emmanuel”.

Adults need a ‘nightlight’, too, when we face the challenges of life on this blue marble at the edge of eternity.

That nightlight that is available to us all is the Word – for us as Christians, it is the Gospel, the Good News of Christ...

As it is written in the Gospel of John,

In [Christ the Word] was life, and the life was the light of [humanity]. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:4

That Word – that “Christ light”, is not limited to the written words of the Bible.

We can access that nightlight through prayer – talking to God.

Not all prayers are spoken aloud- or in words at all;

Some are in the form of just listening – or even seeing, as in being a witness.

Some prayers are about serving God, with helping hands and patient feet, and some prayers are for singing.

Listen now to this ancient song called ‘Phos Hillaron’ – or ‘Hilarious Light’...

O Gladsome Light of the Holy Glory, of the Immortal Father.

Heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ.

Now that we have come to the setting of the Sun, and behold the light of evening, I praise God –

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

For it is good at all times to worship God with songs of praise,

O Son of God and Giver of Life.

Amen

John 1:1-14

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

² He was in the beginning with God;

³ all things were made through him,
and without him was not anything made that was made.

⁴ In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men.

⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

⁷ He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light,
that all might believe through him.

⁸ He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him,
yet the world knew him not.

¹¹ He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.

¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God;

¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man,
but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth;
we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.